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MAKE A CLEAN BREAST OF IT

to admit and explain some wrongdoing; to confess something

1. The thief admitted to the judge that he was guilty and told him the whole story of his crime. He *made a clean breast of it*.
2. The children had lied about taking the candy without permission. They eventually went to their father and *made a clean breast of it*, telling him everything.

Compare to: *wipe the slate clean*; *get something off (one's) chest*

Whereas *make a clean breast of it* concerns a wrongdoing, *get something off one's chest* refers more generally to one's troubles, worries, or concerns. The expression suggests that guilt is kept in one's breast (heart) and that by revealing one's guilt, one cleans one's breast.

MAKE A LONG STORY SHORT

to summarize; to tell only the main points

1. To *make a long story short*, I think your idea is terrible.
2. He tried to *make a long story short*, but she wouldn't let him finish.

MAKE A MOUNTAIN OUT OF A MOLEHILL

to exaggerate the importance of something; to react more strongly to a situation than is reasonably called for

1. I know you feel hurt because Jean didn't invite you to her wedding, but it was a very small wedding, with just family members and very close friends. You're *making a mountain out of a molehill* if you get upset about it.
2. The clerk gave me the wrong item, then he charged me the wrong price and gave me the wrong change. Should I complain to the manager about him, or am I *making a mountain out of a molehill*?

A molehill is a very small pile of dirt made by a small animal, a mole, which digs tunnels underground. To think that a molehill is as large as a mountain is to greatly exaggerate.

MAKE ENDS MEET

to manage financially; to have enough money for one's basic needs

1. We can hardly pay the rent, buy enough food, and keep the children in clothing. We're barely *making ends meet*.
2. Roger was unable to support his family on his teacher's salary. He *made ends meet* by taking a second job.

Synonym: *get by*

Compare to: *keep (one's) head above water*

Both *keep one's head above water* and *make ends meet* mean having just enough money but no extra, although the former conveys a feeling of desperation. *Keep one's head above water* can also mean survival in situations other than financial, whereas *make ends meet* is limited to financial survival.

MAKE HEADS OR TAILS OF (SOMETHING)

to understand something

1. I can't hear you clearly because the telephone connection is bad. I can't *make heads or tails of* what you're saying.
2. First Louise turned the book one way, then the other. She couldn't *make heads or tails of* the picture she was looking at.

The head is the top or front of something, while the tail is the bottom or back. In use since the 1600s, the phrase *make heads or tails of something* means to understand it from beginning to end (top to bottom). The expression is usually used in the negative or in question form.

MAKE (ONE'S) BLOOD BOIL

to cause someone to become extremely angry

1. I had told Fred never to borrow my car without permission again, but he did it anyway. That *makes my blood boil*.
2. The secretary could hardly believe what one of the office workers had said about her. She was angrier than she could ever remember being before. It *made her blood boil*.

Compare to: *hopping mad*; *hot under the collar*; *boiling point*

The expression suggests that when one is very angry, one's blood gets so hot that it boils.

MAKE (ONE'S) MOUTH WATER

to make one salivate in anticipation of something good

1. The chocolate in the display window looks delicious. It *makes my mouth water*.
2. Charles had been saving his money, and now he was so close to being able to buy the sports car he wanted, it *made his mouth water*. He could practically taste it.

The expression is often used in reference to something good to eat (sentence 1), but it can also be used figuratively (sentence 2).

MAKE OR BREAK

to be the deciding factor in whether something succeeds or fails

1. The Smiths were about to sell their house, but the buyers didn't like the color. The Smiths decided to give it a new coat of paint at no extra cost, in case painting the house might *make or break* the deal.

2. Susan decided to study for the test through the night. She knew that her grade on this test would *make or break* her chances of getting admitted to graduate school.

Compare to: *turning point*

MAKE (SOMETHING) FROM SCRATCH

to make something by putting together the separate basic components, rather than using a mix or kit or buying something pre-made

1. My mother never buys cake mixes or ready-made cookies at the supermarket. She always buys the flour, sugar, butter, and eggs, and *makes cakes and cookies from scratch*.
2. George didn't use a kit from a store to build a playhouse for his children. Instead, he designed the playhouse himself, bought all the materials he needed, and *made it from scratch*.

Compare to: *start from scratch*

The expression *make something from scratch* is usually used to describe baked goods (sentence 1). Something *made from scratch* is considered to be superior to something pre-made, because it is probably made more carefully and with the best ingredients.

MAKE THE GRADE

to meet standards; to be satisfactory

1. Of the ten semifinalists in the competition, only three *made the grade* to become finalists.
2. At the end of many manufacturing processes, people check the quality of the goods produced. If the final products don't *make the grade*, they have to be thrown out.

Synonym: *up to snuff*

Compare to: *cut the mustard*

Whereas *make the grade* and *up to snuff* can be used to describe both people (sentence 1) and things (sentence 2), *cut the mustard* is usually used with people.

MAKE TRACKS

to leave, usually quickly

1. We have no reason to stay around, so let's get going. Let's *make tracks*.
2. The boys were playing catch when they accidentally broke one of Mr. Carson's front windows. You've never seen two boys *make tracks* as fast as they did.

Compare to: *beat a hasty retreat*

MARK TIME

to wait out one's time by doing the minimum and without progressing

1. Richard isn't interested in making a career out of the army. He's just putting in the minimum amount of time, *marking time* until he can leave.

2. Carol doesn't particularly care for the job she has now, so she's decided to *mark time* until the job she really wants comes along.

The expression originates from the military command "Mark time!" in which soldiers march in place, i.e., move their feet up and down (go through the motions of marching) without moving forward.

METHOD TO (ONE'S) MADNESS

explanation; forethought or logic

1. There is some *method to her madness*. It's just difficult to understand her way of doing things.
2. There is a *method to my madness*. I like to work on difficult jobs in the morning, when I have the most energy. I save all the simple, boring tasks in the evening, when I need less brain power.

Antonym: *rhyme or reason, no*

MIDAS TOUCH

the ability to make money or to be successful at everything one becomes involved in

1. Everything Linda does is a success. She really has *the Midas touch*.
2. When it comes to investing money and buying stocks, they have *the Midas touch*. It seems like everything they buy goes up in value.

The expression originates from the story of Midas, a mythological king of Phrygia, who was given the power to turn anything he touched into gold.

MILLSTONE AROUND (ONE'S) NECK

a burden or handicap, or a source of worry or concern

1. My elderly parents' house is a *millstone around my neck*. They are unable to keep it up and I have to do all the repairs myself or pay someone to do them for me. I wish they would sell the house and rent an apartment instead.
2. This year's taxes have become a *millstone around my neck*. If I had just gotten them done early, they wouldn't be stressing me out now.

Synonym: *albatross around (one's) neck*

A millstone is a very heavy stone on which one grinds grain in a mill. If a millstone was tied around one's neck, it would be a great burden.

MIND (ONE'S) OWN BUSINESS

to not inquire about, become involved in, or interfere with other people's affairs

1. Sarah started to ask them some very personal questions. They told her to *mind her own business*.
2. They were just sitting on the bus bench, *mind[ing] their own business*, when a stranger approached them and started telling them his life story.

Synonyms: *none of (one's) business!*

Antonym: *stick (one's) nose in*

The expression *mind your own business* is a common response of annoyance at a prying or rude inquiry. It is a very direct, even rude, response, and is only used between people of equal social standing.

MISS THE BOAT

to miss an opportunity because one is too late

1. I saw the furniture advertised on sale, but I didn't get to the store in time to buy it. I *missed the boat* on that one.
2. Daniel plans to apply for college at the last possible moment. If he doesn't allow himself enough time, he's going to *miss the boat*.

MONEY TO BURN

extra money; money to spend however one likes

1. The company managers are taking us all out to an expensive restaurant for lunch. They must have *money to burn*!
2. I have to be careful how I spend my money. I don't have *money to burn*.

The expression suggests that one has so much extra money that one can afford to burn it.

MONKEY AROUND

to play like a monkey, i.e., climb on or examine things with curiosity

1. The children have to play in their bedroom. The living room is not for them to *monkey around* in.
2. Steve likes to *monkey around* with old cars to see if he can fix them.

Compare to: *monkey business*; *clown around*; *horse around*; *fool around*

Monkey around emphasizes curiosity or the climbing aspect of play whereas *horse around* emphasizes the physical nature of play and *clown around* means to act silly. *Fool around* is the most general of these and could substitute for the other three.

MONKEY BUSINESS

suspicious activity (sentence 1) or mischievous activity (sentence 2)

1. The boss wasn't sure, but he suspected that there was some *monkey business* going on with the company accounts.
2. The children had become very quiet in the playroom and their mother decided it was time to see what kind of *monkey business* they were up to.

Synonym: *hanky-panky*

Compare to: *monkey around*

MORE THAN MEETS THE EYE

some hidden aspect to a situation

1. I can't see any reason why this man on the telephone is trying to give me a free vacation. *There's more here than meets the eye*.
2. When Jerry had received a letter saying that the company was letting him go, the reason the letter gave was a lack of work, but Jerry had been busier than ever these last few months. He thought to himself, "*There's more to this than meets the eye*."

MORE (SOMETHING) THAN (ONE) BARGAINED FOR

more than one expected

1. I agreed to join a book club because the saleswoman said I didn't have to buy any book I didn't want, but I was shocked when I learned I had to spend a certain amount of money every month. It was *more of a commitment than I bargained for*.
2. I thought you were looking forward to being in the army. Was it *more work than you bargained for*?

The expression is often used in a negative sense, i.e., more money, more trouble, more work, etc. than one expected or wanted.

MORE THAN ONE WAY TO SKIN A CAT, THERE'S

there are different ways to accomplish the same thing; there are different possible solutions to a problem

1. There must be some way to raise enough money to buy a car. We've put all our savings together but it isn't enough. Still, there's *more than one way to skin a cat*. I'll get a second job!
2. My friends asked me how they could accomplish something that seemed impossible. I told them that they simply hadn't looked at all the possibilities. I told them there's always *more than one way to skin a cat* and that they would eventually find a solution.

MOVE HEAVEN AND EARTH

to try very hard to do something

1. The young man was accused of a terrible crime. His parents were convinced that he was innocent and swore they would *move heaven and earth* to get him acquitted.
2. Linda's daughter is getting married on Friday, the same day Linda gets back from an out-of-town business trip. She will *move heaven and earth* to get to the wedding on time.

The expression suggests how hard one would have to try if one tried to move things as big as heaven and earth.